

An English lesson for Ibrahim Ali
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COMMENT When I woke up on Monday morning, I went to the Malaysiakini website and learned that I was the target of a demonstration at the US Embassy.

I didn't know whether to be surprised or honoured. Back when I was ambassador, there were so many demonstrations against the United States - about serious issues.

NONE And now the demonstration was about me? Me?

All because I told the truth and called Perkasa a 'militant' group?

And all because Perkasa chief Ibrahim Ali doesn't understand the difference between an adjective and a noun?

This whole issue started because English is not Ibrahim's native language. I don't blame him for the fact that he doesn't understand the nuances of English. It is not his native language. I wish I knew more Bahasa Melayu.

But before you go on a two-week rant and call me "tolo!" (dumb) and "bodoh" (stupid) and lead a demonstration against the American embassy, at least get your facts straight.

It seems Ibrahim doesn't care. He is milking his ignorance for everything it is worth. It seems he loves his moment in the sun, before all the microphones.

I called Perkasa a militant Malay group, which it is. When I used the word "militant", it was an adjective. It means "aggressive in character" or "fighting hard for your cause", for example, like a "militant human rights activist".

Ibrahim should have accepted that as a compliment.

When the word "militant" is used as an adjective, the word does not mean someone who uses violence.

When the word "militant" is used as a noun, it usually does mean someone who engages in violence.

So when I mentioned Perkasa - just six words in my 800-word Wall Street Journal op-ed about "a new militant group called Perkasa" - I did not use the word as a noun. I used the word as an adjective - meaning aggressive or belligerent.

Those are words that certainly describe Ibrahim. Just watch his videos, and you will see what I mean. He is belligerent. He is aggressive.

But I never called Perkasa a group that engages in violence or terrorism.

Ibrahim Ali's wild rantings

My colleagues here in Washington think that it is "cool" that I have been the subject of a demonstration at the American embassy, all over something that a simple glance at the Oxford English Dictionary could have resolved easily.

By continuing his rant, Ibrahim is only making my views seem more important than they otherwise are.

So I should say thank you, Ibrahim, for being a great PR man. The Wall Street Journal only has 8,663 subscribers in Malaysia (but over 1 million in America). Thanks to your wild rantings, you have made sure

- and thanks to Utusan Malaysia and Bernama and New Straits Times and everyone else - that more and more people in Malaysia know what I think about you and your (militant) organisation.

As I was writing this, I read what Hishammuddin Hussein recently had to say about the Allah issue: "Church leaders understood fully that there are different levels of maturity and understanding in our constituents."

I think that is true about Ibrahim Ali, Perkasa, and all those who are pandering to him. There are different levels of understanding and maturity in the Malay community, as Hisham said.

But the question is, why pander to ignorance?

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